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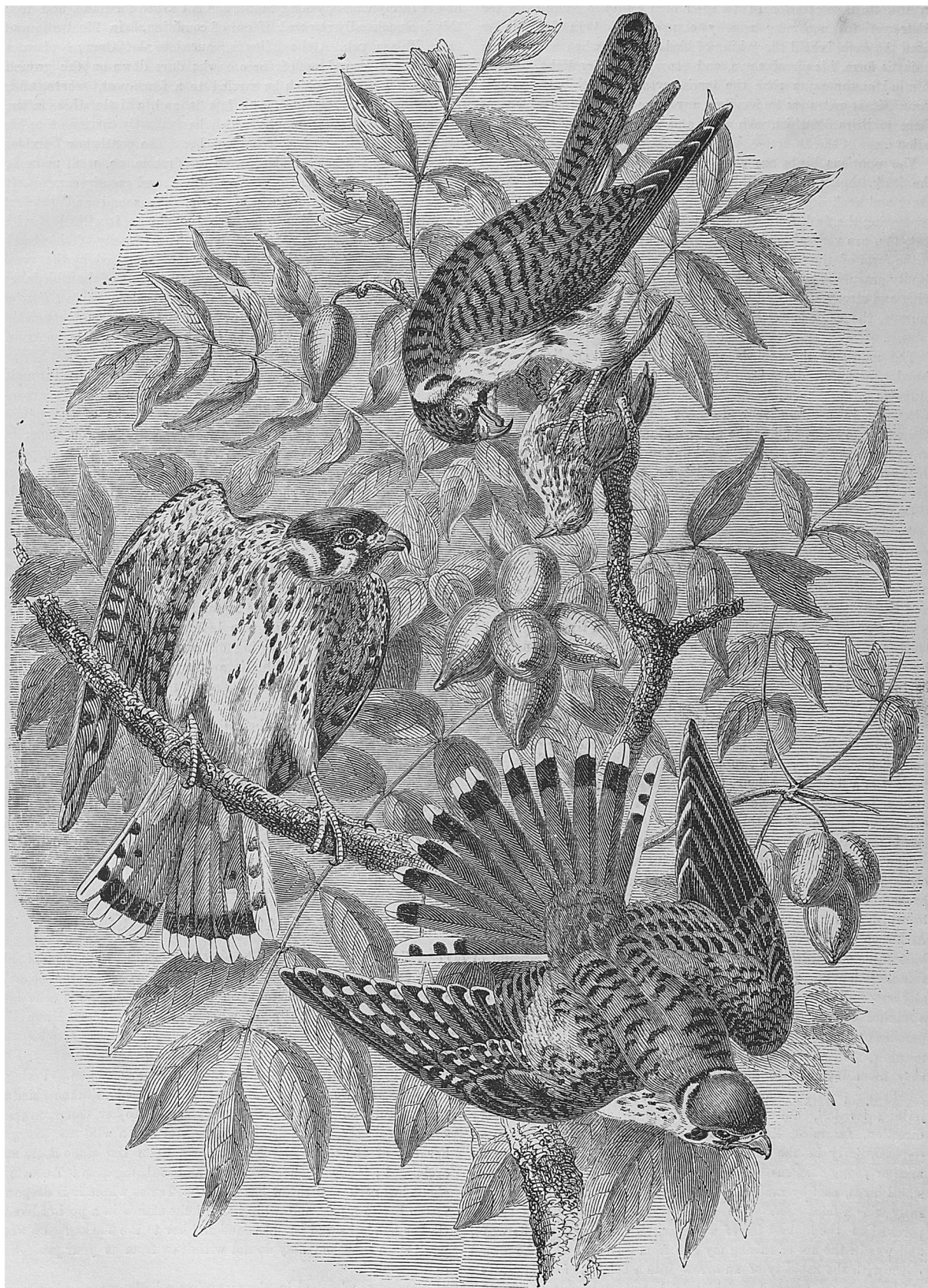
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THE AMERICAN SPARROW-HAWK.



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At the head of the interesting class of birds—induced, no doubt, by the usual tendency of mankind to honour those who are pre-eminently  
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endowed with the faculty of destructiveness—most naturalists have placed the rapacious tribes, which wage continual war upon all

their less powerful neighbours. It is true that, in these latter days, when old prejudices are gradually passing away, some naturalists have cast them from their high estate to make room for other perhaps not more worthy occupants; but in the popular mind the eagle is still the "king of birds;" and when viewing his majestic form, his piercing eye, and strong and lofty flight, bearing in mind at the same time the terrific weapons with which he is armed, it is not easy to imagine any more expressive emblem of those qualities for which men were and are still raised above their fellows.

The rapacious birds are characterised especially by the form of the beak, the upper mandible being considerably longer than the lower and hooked at the end, forming a most formidable instrument for tearing the flesh from the bones of their prey. The legs and feet, too, are very powerful, and the strong sharp claws partaking of the form of the beak, are adapted for seizing their victim with a deadly grasp. They are remarkable also for their great length of wing and strong and rapid flight—qualities in which, as probably in courage, the eagle is excelled by many of his smaller relatives, the falcons.

The males of these birds are generally much smaller than the females, and often differ from them considerably in colouring; their plumage also changes greatly with age, the young birds often appearing in a dress very different from that which they are ultimately to wear, and as the mature plumage is generally attained by degrees, the birds sometimes exhibit such multifarious characters in the different phases of their existence, as to have given rise to the establishment of half-a-dozen species in place of one.

One of the handsomest of the smaller hawks is that of which our engraving (p. 297) contains four representations—the American sparrow-hawk (*Falco sparverius*). This elegant little bird inhabits almost every part of the United States, but is especially plentiful in the northern portions. The female is about eleven inches long, and twenty-three in expanse of wing; the male is about an inch and a half shorter, and measures two inches less from tip to tip. The head is of a bluish ash colour, with the crown reddish; round the head is a whitish border, in which are seven black spots; the back is reddish bay, barred with black; the under side of the body yellowish white streaked with brown; the quill feathers of the wings are black, spotted with white. The tail feathers are reddish bay, with a broad black band near the end, and beyond this a yellowish white tip; the two outer tail feathers are white. The beak is of a light blue colour, tipped with black; the cere and legs are yellow, and the claws blue-black. Such are the general colours of both sexes of this handsome bird, which differ nevertheless in several minor particulars which space forbids our pointing out.

The American sparrow-hawk builds its nest in a hollow tree; it chooses a hole pretty high up, where some large bough has been broken off. The female is said to lay four or five eggs, of a light brownish yellow colour spotted with a darker tint. Wilson, the American ornithologist, who devoted his life to the study of the birds of his adopted country, has left us a most animated account of this little hawk. He says: "It flies rather irregularly, occasionally suspending itself in the air, hovering over a particular spot for a minute or two, and then shooting off in another direction. It perches on the top of a dead tree or pole, in the middle of a field or meadow, and, as it alights, shuts its long wings so suddenly, that they seem instantly to disappear; it sits here in an almost perpendicular position, sometimes for an hour at a time, frequently jerking its tail, and reconnoitring the ground below, in every direction, for mice, lizards, etc. It approaches the farm-house, particularly in the morning—skulking about the barn-yard for mice or young chickens. It frequently plunges into a thicket after small birds, as if by random; but always with a particular and generally with a fatal aim. One day I observed a bird of this species perched on the highest top of a poplar, on the skirts of the wood, and was in the act of raising my gun from my eye, when he swept down with the rapidity of an arrow into a thicket of briers, about thirty yards off, where I shot him dead, and on coming up, found a small field-sparrow quivering in his grasp. Both our aims had been taken at the same instant, and, unfortunately for him, both were fatal. It is particularly fond of watching along hedge rows and in orchards, where small birds usually resort. When grasshoppers are plenty,

they form a considerable part of his food." The remainder of its sustenance is made up of small snakes, lizards, mice, and birds, and it rarely eats anything that it has not killed for itself, and even this is occasionally rejected, if out of condition. In illustration of this, Wilson relates the following anecdote:—"One morning, a gentleman observed one of these hawks dart down on the ground and seize a mouse, which he carried to a fence-post, where, after examining it for some time, he left it, and, a little while after, pounced upon another mouse, which he instantly carried off to his nest, in the hollow of a tree hard by. The gentleman, anxious to know why the hawk had rejected the first mouse, went up to it, and found it to be almost covered with lice, and greatly emaciated! Here was not only delicacy of taste, but sound and prudent reasoning—If I carry this to my nest, thought he, it will fill it with vermin, and hardly be worth eating." The voracity of this hawk may be imagined from the circumstance, also related by the great American ornithologist, that in the stomach of one of these birds, he found the greater part of the body of an American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), "including the unbroken feet and claws; though the robin actually measures within half an inch as long as the sparrow-hawk."

The blue jay (*Garrulus cristatus*), a very common bird throughout the United States, is one of the greatest enemies of the sparrow-hawk—at least as far as most voracious attacks of the tongue may be regarded as signs of enmity. Like all his congeners, he has the greatest facility in imitating sounds; and, when disposed for a little quiet fun, can mimic the notes of other birds with such exactness as to deceive the most practised ear. He appears to be particularly fond of teasing the sparrow-hawk with his garrulous nonsense, "imitating his cry wherever he sees him, and squealing out as if caught; this soon brings a number of his own tribe around him, who all join in the frolic, darting about the hawk, and feigning the cries of a bird sorely wounded, and already under the clutches of its devourer; while others lie concealed in bushes, ready to second the attack. But this ludicrous farce often terminates tragically. The hawk, singling out one of the most insolent and provoking, sweeps upon him in an unguarded moment, and offers him up a sacrifice to his hunger and resentment. In an instant the tune is changed; all their buffoonery vanishes, and loud and incessant screams proclaim their disaster."

A much smaller bird than the jay, however, is able singly to drive this depredator from his haunts, at least during the breeding season, when affection for his mate and young prompts him to exert all his powers and dare every danger to save them from the destroyer. This is the king-bird or tyrant-flycatcher (*Muscicapa tyrannus*), a bird of passage in the United States, whose dauntless courage makes even the eagle fly from his attacks.

### THE WALLACHIAN ROBBER.—III.

Poor Zdenku was filled with serious anxiety. He racked his brain to no purpose in the attempt to discover why the formidable woman was so severe upon him. Meanwhile, his wife had managed to get an inkling of what was in the wind. From the glances of Maruschka and Dschurdschu upon Wantscha, who was crouching down in the corner, as well as from the alarm betrayed by Wantscha's looks, she gathered more than was spoken. Perhaps she also, with womanly ingenuity, guessed what had taken place at the garden-gate. At all events delay seemed to her dangerous, for she immediately sprang upon her daughter like a wild cat, dragged her out of the corner, forced her down upon the stone floor, and exclaimed: "She is your slave, body and soul, mistress! Tie a stone about her neck and throw her into the Temes where it is deepest; fasten her to a post and whip her till she stands in a pool of blood; tie her hands behind her back and sell her to the Turks! Do what you please with her, only do not withdraw from us your protection and favour."

Wantscha, who had in the meantime a little recovered from her surprise, attempted to resist. But her efforts were all in vain. Her mother kept her down with hand and knee, and compelled her by blows to submit to her fate. Zdenku stared in blank astonishment at the strange scene, which was a new riddle to him, instead of